

DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT & HOUSING

2014 'T' Street, Suite 210, Sacramento, CA 95814-6835
(916) 227-2873 TTY (800) 700-2320 Fax (916) 227-2870
www.dfeh.ca.gov

**PRESS RELEASE**

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CONTACT: Dia S. Poole
(916) 227-2873

**DFEH OPENS OFFICES IN LOS ANGELES AND SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA TO
MEDIATE EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS**

Sacramento – The Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) officially launched its new Pilot Mediation Program, opening two new offices today in Northern and Southern California. Department officials were joined this morning by local government and private industry leaders at simultaneous press conferences at the offices in Los Angeles and Emeryville.

The Mediation Program, the first statewide program of its kind, brings together employers and employees on a voluntary basis to resolve formal complaints of workplace discrimination filed with DFEH's Enforcement Division. Mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution that utilizes a trained, third-party facilitator to help the parties arrive at a mutually agreeable solution to the underlying issues causing the conflict. A key feature of the program is that it is free of charge to the employer and the employee. It is anticipated that the financial and emotional costs associated with a lengthy DFEH investigation and potential litigation will be reduced.

DFEH Director Dennis Hayashi introduced Northern California Mediation Administrator Ronald Whiten at the Emeryville event that included remarks in support by Mark Morodomi, Supervising Attorney from the office of Oakland City Attorney John Russo; Barbara Thomson, chair of the Northern California Employer RoundTable (NCERT); and Maureen Hochler, Co-President of the Northern California Association of Conflict Resolvers. The Emeryville office will initially mediate complaints brought to the Department from the seventeen (17) counties in and around the San Francisco Bay Area: Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa, San Joaquin, Solano, San Francisco, Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, San Mateo, Sonoma, Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz.

DFEH Deputy Director Andrea Rosa introduced Southern California Mediation Administrator Nora Baltierrez at the Los Angeles event and received statements of support from representatives of city and county equal employment opportunity programs and private industry, including Dennis Tafoya, director of the County of Los Angeles Affirmative Action Compliance Office, Sharon Agnew, Acting Chair and members of the board of directors of the Southern California Employer RoundTable (SCERT). The Los Angeles Office will initially mediate complaints filed with the Department's Los Angeles District Office that covers communities within the County of Los Angeles.

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"Adding mediation to California's discrimination complaint process is long overdue," Hayashi said. "The implementation of the DFEH Pilot Mediation Program signals this Administration's commitment to providing California's employees, employers, and businesses with the resources they need to create and maintain a working environment that is free of discrimination and reprisal. This program was specifically designed to address the needs we have identified through years of investigating and litigating employment discrimination complaints."

"Mediation is a confidential, collaborative, and cost effective tool that resolves often complex employment disputes, and we look forward to helping Californians take advantage of this opportunity," Hayashi concluded.

According to Rosa, as implemented, the program expects to mediate approximately 2400 complaints per year, out of an annual total of approximately 18,000 employment discrimination claims filed with DFEH. The Department plans to expand the program to include complaints brought by state employees against state agencies and complaints filed with the remaining DFEH district offices throughout the state. Following today's press conference, a special briefing was held in Emeryville for equal opportunity officers from State agencies.

DFEH enforces laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Further information about DFEH and the Mediation Program may be obtained by accessing the Program's website at www.dfehmp.ca.gov.

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